

I believe... in taking the first step

There is a French proverb that goes like this: "The first step binds to the second." I believe in taking the first step. When I tentatively extend my foot to take that first step, a warm feeling inside propels me to take the next step.

As far as I can remember, I was never a confident person, not in kindergarten where show-and-tells were the vogue, and not in primary school. I was never the one who impressed the teacher with my moving eloquence, and was never the person to volunteer to speak during assembly talks. I was the one who kept quiet and blended into the beige walls, silently praying the teacher would not notice me, the proverbial wallflower.

When it first dawned on me that my secondary school required oral presentations and grading for classroom participation, I plunged into a living nightmare.

Having to give mandatory presentations one after another, the necessity forced me to get used to the routine. Yet, what really challenged my courage beyond its limit was the necessity to speak up in class voluntarily. To volunteer to put myself under the intense scrutiny of thirty-two pairs of eyes, that I could not bring myself to do.

I procrastinated.

For weeks and months, I spoke minimally. After classmates found their voices one by one, I found myself left behind. I knew I had to change.

One lesson, I raised my clammy hands, took a large mouthful of air, spoke, and collapsed into my seat, suddenly weary to the bone.

For countless other times, I rehearsed the scene and the lines in my mind repeatedly before I raised my hand and delivered my lines. The whole time, my heart would be pounding.

Even as I stammered and hem-and-hawed, my heart seemed to get lighter every time I volunteered to speak. Two years down the road, I have grown to enjoy and feel comfortable sharing my ideas in the classroom.

When did all this change? I believe it was from the very moment I resolved to stop worrying and just speak up.

Sometimes I worry too much and there is an invisible wall erected in my mind thousands of meters tall, and I cannot go past it. Deep in my mind, I know that if I just stop worrying unnecessarily and take that first step, the wall will cease to exist. Just as Roman philosopher Seneca put it, "It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult."

If I just think of doing something but never break through the barrier of my mind, nothing will change. It is only when I take the first step and follow it up with other steps that the gears detailing my growth will turn.

Even now, the fear of attention sometimes grips me and I stay rooted to my seat, immobilized. So I chide myself for being a coward, stand up and walk to that mike.

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